



Mykola Semena

Born in 1950 in Bobrovytsya, northeast of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, Mykola Semena has lived and worked as a journalist in Crimea since 1991, first for the Russian newspaper "Izvestiya" (1991-1997), then for the Ukrainian weekly "Zerkalo Nedeli" and daily newspaper "Den." Semena is the author of two books, including a biography of Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev (2010).

Semena was one of the only independent journalists to remain on the peninsula following Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. Semena contributed articles to RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service and its Crimea Desk, which was established soon after the annexation of the peninsula.

On April 19, 2016, after Russian police searched Semena's home and confiscated computers and storage media, the de facto Crimean prosecutor-general ordered Semena to remain on the peninsula while he was investigated for alleged "calls to undermine Russia's territorial integrity via the mass media." Semena has been forced to stay in Crimea ever since, despite his requests to travel to Kyiv for urgently needed medical care.

What is Mykola Semena Accused Of?

In an indictment formally presented on January 20, 2017, Russian authorities charged Semena with violating Article 280.1 of Russia's criminal code, which criminalizes "public calls for actions violating the territorial integrity" of Russia. Semena [rejects](#) the charge.

The separatism-related charges stem from an opinion piece Semena wrote for his Krym.Realii blog, in which he criticized Russia's seizure of Crimea and expressed support for enhancing a blockade of the peninsula initiated by Ukrainian activists. Semena's column was part of a wide-ranging discussion on the Krym.Realii website about options for Crimea and was a response to an earlier column opposing the blockade.

If such calls are made via the mass media, including online outlets, a person can be sentenced to as many as five years in prison. The law was added to the Russian criminal code in December 2013, and came into force in May 2014 - several weeks after Crimea was annexed by Russia. To date, at least [15 cases \(including Semena's\) have been initiated](#) on the basis of Article 280.1 -- most in reference to Crimea.

When Does Mykola Semena's Trial Open?

A [preliminary hearing](#) in the Semena case took place on February 28, 2017 by the Zheleznodorozhny district court in Simferopol, the capitol of Crimea. The trial is set to begin on March 20.

Who Supports Mykola Semena?

On February 16, more than two dozen prominent human rights groups expressed "outrage" over Semena's impending trial, in a statement issued by the [Civic Solidarity Platform](#).

Members of the U.S. Congress, including [Rep. Gerry Connolly](#) (D-VA) and [Rep. Sander Levin](#) (D-MI), have used social media to urge Russia to release Semena immediately.

The [United States](#), the European Union, the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) (PACE), and the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#) (OSCE), have expressed "deep concern" over the Semena case, calling the charges "totally unacceptable" and demanding they be dropped.

International media watchdogs, including the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) and [Reporters Without Borders](#), have called for Semena to be allowed to work freely.

Semena was [awarded](#) the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum's [Pavel Sheremet Journalism Award](#) in absentia in Brussels on November 28, and the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine's [Igor Lyubchenko Press Freedom Award](#) on November 2. Krym.Realii (in English, Crimea Realities), the RFE/RL website to which he contributes, received the Broadcasting Board of Governors 2016 [David Burke award](#).